

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ENRG, UK
SUBJECT: BRITAIN EXPANDS OIL EXPLORATION ZONES

REF: (A) LONDON 1881; (B) 77 LONDON 18184

1. A NEW AREA ADJACENT TO THE WEST-OF-SHETLANDS OIL
DISCOVERY AREAS HAS BEEN DESIGNATED AS AN OIL EXPLORA-
TION ZONE. THE AREA LIES IMMEDIATELY ABOVE SECTION
206 AND INCLUDES 15 BLOCKS, OR HALF THE AREA OF A
CONVENTIONAL SECTION, IN SOME OF THE DEEPEST WATERS YET
DESIGNATED. THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF THE SECTION BEGINS
AT CUSTOMARY CONTINENTAL SHELF DEPTH, LESS THAN 600
FEET, THEN THE SEABED PLUNGES TO OVER 1,200 FEET AND
EVENTUALLY EXCEEDS 3,000 FEET. REFTELS REPORT ON
MULTIPLE OIL FINDS IN NEARBY SHALLOW WATERS. IT APPEAR
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LIKELY THAT THE NEW SECTION WILL BE OFFERED FOR EX-
PLORATION IN THE UPCOMING SIXTH LICENSING ROUND, WHICH
IS STILL SOME MONTHS IN THE FUTURE.

2. RECENTLY DESIGNATED EXPLORATION ZONES IN THE
WESTERN APPROACHES RESULTED FROM THE BROAD SETTLEMENT
OF THE BOUNDARY WITH FRANCE (ALTHOUGH THE MINOR CATO-

GRAPHIC ERROR DISPUTE STILL DELAYS THE FINAL FIXING OF THE LINE.) PARTS OF THESE NEW SECTIONS ARE ALSO LIKELY TO BE OFFERED IN THE SIXTH ROUND. THE COMBINATION OF ALL NEW AND OLD DESIGNATED AREAS AROUND THE UK NOW TOTALS 621,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS.

3. FURTHER DESIGNATIONS NORTHWEST OF THE SHETLANDS OR NORTH OF THE EXISTING NORTH SEA EXPLORATION ZONES (THE 62ND PARALLEL) ARE SEEN AS UNLIKELY UNTIL NEW MEDIAN LINES ARE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED. DENMARK WILL NEGOTIATE IN BOTH AREAS ON BEHALF OF THE FAROES, AND NORWAY WILL BE INVOLVED FOR THE NORTH-OF-62ND SECTOR. HOWEVER, NO ARBITRATION BOARDS HAVE YET BEEN FORMED FOR EITHER AREA, AND ONLY PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN HELD. FURTHER DEFINITION OF EXPLORATION ZONES BETWEEN THE UK AND IRELAND APPEAR UNLIKELY FOR SOME TIME. MUCH OF THE IRISH AND CELTIC SEA AREA HAS ALREADY BEEN DESIGNATED BY BOTH COUNTRIES, EXPLORATION TO DATE HAS BEEN DISAPPOINTING IN BOTH IRISH AND U.K. WATERS, AND THERE SEEMS TO BE A MUTUAL DISINCLINATION TO RUSH INTO A FINAL SETTLEMENT.

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